

March 4, 2018

Food for the Poor

PRAYER

Greetings and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The one who was, the one who is, and the one who is to come. Amen.

SERMON

I was hungry, you fed me. Thirsty, you gave me drink. A stranger, you took me in. Naked, you gave me clothing. Imprisoned, you visited me. Sick, you took care of me. But Lord, Lord when were you ever hungry and we fed you. Thirsty and we gave you something to drink. When were you a stranger and we took you in. Naked and we gave you clothing. When were you in prison or sick and we visited and took care of you. And the Lord replies, "Whenever you do these things for the least of our brothers and sisters, you're doing it for me." Matthew 25

Not too long ago, I traveled with Food for the Poor to Honduras. Food for the Poor being one of the largest international food and relief ministries, non-profit organizations based here in the United States. The goal was to see what Food for the Poor, thanks to partners like you and I, was doing already in Honduras. But also, to see where the need is. And the need continues to be great in third world countries. And Jesus needs our help to change all of that.

The last full day of this week in Honduras we climbed aboard our bus. It was one of those short buses, you know, smashed in kind of thing. And it ran just fine, but it was really beat up and battered on the outside. And off we went from where we were staying and roads in third world countries are nothing like first world countries of course. They were very rough to begin with but the further and further we got out from

the city area where we were, the rougher and rougher it got. And we started bouncing all around in the bus.

We finally got to this area where we started bouncing up the side of a very large mountain. And as I looked out the windows of the bus, all I could see was garbage. Garbage with a smoky haze over everything. Because you see, that day we were going to visit the garbage dump. We climbed up to the top of this huge mountain. And because it was not a natural mountain, it was shaped by the garbage. And at the top it was completely flat and barren of trees. And it was flat because that was where the garbage trucks pulled in.

So, we got to that area, we pulled into that garbage truck area where they would release all the garbage. And as the doors of our bus opened, the first thing that hit me was this huge wave of heat. Now you're from Florida, I'm from Southeast Florida, we know something about heat, don't we? But this was intense heat because we were up so high. Absolutely no shade, we were just so much closer to the sun. It was hot.

Then I stepped off the bus and took a breath of air and as the air traveled up my nostrils and down my throat into my lungs, everything started burning. And I had the sense of everything going to burst into flames. You see, all those fumes that we saw in the air were the result of things combusting together in the garbage and releasing potentially hazardous fumes in the air.

And as I started to get acclimated to our surroundings, I could see from where I was to the Narthex entrance of your church, there were men standing. It looked like about 20-some men. And our guide explained to us that these are folks that live at the garbage dump. And he went on to explain that when the garbage trucks would come in, people from local villages would start walking behind the garbage trucks. It could be

up to 150-200 people that would follow the trucks up into the dump. And these 150-200 some people plus the people that lived at the dump, which I could see like about 20 men at that point, would all converge on the garbage. They would be looking for things that could be of use to them. Maybe that they could resell. But primarily, especially for the folks that lived at the dump, they were looking for two different things.

One was recyclables. Things made of glass, plastic, aluminum cans that they could recycle. And they each had their own pile of recyclables that they were keeping. And our guide said that someone from the city every month and a half to two months would come out and buy their recyclables from them. Maybe paying each person, if they were lucky, a penny for their pile of aluminum cans.

And the other thing that in particular the folks that lived at the dump were looking for, but everybody was looking for, was food. Now keep in mind that Honduras is a hot place to be, for starters. And garbage, sitting out in garbage cans and dumpsters gets bad really fast. Add to this that the garbage trucks don't pick up garbage as often in third world countries as they do in first world countries. I don't know about you, but our garbage folks come by twice a week. Thank you.

But in a third world country, you're looking maybe a pick up every month. Maybe even longer than that. This is not nice garbage. And if you're looking for food, you're talking about really rotten food. That's had flies all over it, maggots. Rodents and other things gnawing on it.

And with that volume of people that were sorting through the garbage and if you were one of the ones looking for food, even if you did find some it would be very minimal at the best. But for the folks that lived at the dump if they did find food, it meant that maybe that day they would have a bite of something to eat. Maybe even something they could feed their children. Rotten food.

As our guide is telling us about how these folks live and that the folks that lived at the dump were going to be displaced because the Honduran government had decided to close this dump down and build another, start another garbage dump somewhere else.

Out of this crowd steps a woman. And I hadn't realized there were women and children standing behind this kind of wall of men. So, there were probably 35-50 men, women, and children that lived at the dump. And this woman steps up and she stands next to our guide. And as he continues to speak, three children come and stand next to her. The youngest looked like he was 2 years old. Later on, we found out he was a 3-year-old, it's just due to extreme malnutrition his growth had been stunted. And he looked like a 2-year-old. And eventually, a man came and stood with her too. And it was also a uniform kind of thing that it looked like it was part of this presentation.

But note the guide had no idea who this woman, children, and man were. And so, he turned to her and in her language asked who she was and why did she come and stand up here. And so, she spoke back in her language and he translated to us what she said. She said her name was Carmen and these were her children and her husband. And her husband, she and the children have never lived anywhere other than the garbage dump. Never.

And from the very youngest of age, Carmen had prayed to God. And her biggest prayer that she said every single day was, "Dear God please, please rescue us." And that day when she saw our beat up old bus bumping up the side of the mountain. She looked up to the heavens, she said and said, "Thank you Lord, I know that today you are answering my prayers." Wow! It was like a tidal wave washed over this group on the bus.

There were a group of about 15 of us, clergy and laity. You and I know we are the hands that feed the heart of Jesus Christ in today's world. But to have someone so desperately poor, stand there and say I see Jesus. It took my breath away.

And there was this little pause while we all kind of like tried to catch our breath and try to respond. The pause made the guide uncomfortable. So, he jumped in and he turned to Carmen and said to Carmen, "Can we see where you live?" And she responded, "Si, yes." And so off some of us went. Only 5 of us including the guide went with her to see where she lived, and the reason was there were no nice, neat little pathways. We were going to be stomping through garbage.

And so off we trudged. Around, and up and over garbage. And one time my right leg sunk down into the garbage and I thought oh what if something bites me or if I step on something that goes up through my shoe and my foot. But we all made it safely to this area where there were 3 large uneven sticks in the ground and tied between the 3 sticks was a ripped up blue tarp. You and I know them as hurricane tarps. And I walked around to the front of it and looked underneath. And underneath on top of the garbage were broken wood pallets. And Carmen pointed to this and said, "Mi, casa (my house)." This is where she and her family lived. This is where she gave birth to all three of her children. And oh, by the way, she was 8 months pregnant. This is where she would give birth to her next child.

At the end of our day at the garbage dump, we made a big circle and prayed for everybody. And at the end of the prayer, I turned to our guide and said, "Would you please ask Carmen if I can bless her children." And she responded yes. So out of this big circle step three children of the third world. And in my first world eyes, what I see first are dirty children. You know that kind of dirt that you can't just brush

off. It's really in there, that kind of dirt from head to toe. And then my first world eyes look at the clothes they are wearing. None of the clothes matched, and that's okay. But the oldest child had on clothes that were way to big for him. The next child had on clothes that were way to tight for him. And the smallest one that looked like a 2-year-old but was actually a 3-year-old, he was wearing a pair of, not new or clean, of those cloth pull-ups. That was the only thing he was wearing in that intense heat.

And then I looked at their feet. And in my first world eyes, I could see that only one of them was wearing shoes. Flip flops, that were way too small for the child's feet. And the other two children were walking day in and day out barefoot in garbage. When they got to me I put my hands on top of their heads and the best thing I can equate it to is if you've ever petted an animal like cattle that lives its whole life outdoors. And the only shower it gets is when it rains, that's their shower. That was what it was like touching their hair, their heads.

And then I put my hands under their chins and looked into their faces, into their big eyes. And that third world, first world all swirled together, and I just knew that I was standing in God's world. And I thought oh my gosh, these are the least of these. These are the least of these that Jesus is compelling us to reach out and help.

Well Food for the Poor, that some of you may already know because we have partners here already and if you are a partner, thank you. We're about people like you and me. Christians all over this country. Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists all working together to save lives. To transform villages. And to restore hope where there seems to be absolutely no reason to have any hope.

So, the word got out with our partners, with the group that was there, as well as a lot of other people, and within three weeks Food for the

Poor had built a home for Carmen and her family. Part of a community where we built other homes. Concrete block home, tin roof, bedrooms in the house, a kitchen with food to eat, and clean water, as well as a bathroom. Which if you've never used a toilet before, there was a big learning curve for Carmen and her family. They all received medical care. Everyone except the youngest child had some kind of respiratory problem from breathing in those fumes all of the time. All of them had some kind of skin condition from living out in the elements the way they had.

Carmen gave birth to a healthy and happy baby and you probably are familiar with third world statistics about women giving birth. They very often die in childbirth. So just that alone was a huge thing for her to safely give birth. Everybody was given clean clothes to wear. The children were given school uniforms and put into the school that Food for Poor had built and was working with the local church to maintain. It was the first time anyone, or Carmen's or her husband's families had ever attended school. Can you imagine just that one change how that dramatically changed those children's future?

And the husband was put into a skills training program where he is an apprentice learning a trade, a skill. So that eventually he will be able to take care of his family on his own. That's what Food for the Poor is about. Yes, we are about hand-ups when someone is starving, when they're suffering from extreme malnutrition. We've got to get nutritious food into them and get their bodies back regulated. And we've got to get clean water in them.

You know the rule, whether you've been to a third world country or not, don't drink the water. It's contaminated. It's full of parasites. You're going to get sick if you drink it. And I can tell you first hand, I've experienced that accidentally. You're going to vomit continually. You're

going to have diarrhea, not just for a day or so, it can be for quite a while. And we tend to say, "Well the people in those countries, they're used to the water." The only thing we might say they're used to is being sick all the time. Not a good thing. So, we've got to them clean water.

And we've got to get them into safe housing. Carmen's house, if you could call it, what might seem like an extreme case but many, many people in third world countries, in the Latin America and Caribbean countries that are our global neighbors in particular, they're living in homes that are built from twigs, mud, scraps of cardboard, scraps of metal. No protection from the elements. When it rains, it pours in and they're sleeping in mud and water. They live in fear of what may crawl over them but also what might come through their door and do bad things to their family. Maybe even abduct children.

So yes, we are about handouts. Just one of our feeding stations in Port-au-Prince Haiti, you know Haiti is the poorest of poor countries especially in the Western hemisphere. Just one of our feeding stations. We feed over 100,000 meals every single day. So, it's about handouts but it's also about hand-ups. Where we give back to these people something they may never have had. That sense of being able to take care of themselves. That dignity that they've long sought. Actually, is opportune to them through people like you and I working together through Food for the Poor.

Food for the Poor is in its 36th year of providing aid to the third world countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, that are the global neighbors of the United States of America. And as we well know, whatever happens in those countries directly impacts us. We've got to reach out and to help them. And help them where they are so that they can be with their families. And take advantage of the natural resources

that they don't even understand how to even use that we can help teach them about.

You'll see when you look at the brochure that's in your bulletin. There's a little map that shows you the 17 Latin American and Caribbean countries where Food for the Poor primarily works. From Haiti over to Mexico, we're in all of those areas on a regular constant basis. I say primarily because Food for the Poor, anytime there's a natural disaster anywhere or a strong important need. Food for the Poor sets us if we're needed in that area to help. And more often than not, we are. When that happens, we go and help in those areas too.

We were in Texas after Hurricane Harvey. We were in the Keys after Irma. We were in Puerto Rico and are still in Puerto Rico helping to get aid and relief to those areas. So, we really try to work where Christ is calling us as a group, as Christians to reach out and help.

You'll see too there's a lot of different possibilities in this brochure of ways that you can help. I know this church is a giving church. You all do a lot. God bless you. I travel all over this country visiting churches, primarily Episcopal churches, because I'm an Episcopalian priest. And it's a blessing to be at a church like St. Jude's that understands what Christ is calling us to do. You are people of the faith and you're reaching out to help those in need.

I already know that but guess what, I'm here to say please, please look at another way to help as well through Food for the Poor. Talk about the best bang for your buck. For every dollar you give to Food for the Poor, over 95% actually goes to food and aid. Our overhead cost is less than 5%. That's a pretty stunning figure. You go to any of the large groups that have been monitoring non-profit charities in the United States for many years like Better Business Bureau, Forbes, Charity Watch. Food for the Poor is always ranked up at the top.

We're completely transparent about how we use this money because it's God's money. And we're working with Christians all over this country to make the changes that Jesus is calling us to do. That gospel reading today reminds us just who Jesus is. You know, the disciples back then, you know had all these questions because they get it, but they don't get that Jesus is the son of God. And he's saying, "Yeah, this is what's coming and what's coming is my death and resurrection." And he's saying by letting them know preparing them like he prepares us during this Lent season. To be ready to step into his footsteps and be his heart, his hands. And his head and feet in today's world. And being Jesus to other people.

You'll see that as you open this up, there's a little picture of a girl with a goat. So, if you are somebody who likes to text, you can make a donation by texting. There information about how to text. You'll also see that the envelope there's a big yellow strip, there's a perforation where the envelope tears apart. And you're left with a place where you can put in check or cash. You can also give a donation by credit card. There's a place there to fill that information out. Or you can make a pledge and that's up at the top, you can list it and say you want to do it monthly, quarterly, however you want to do it. Be sure to fill out the top portion of this form. That's how Food for the Poor will acknowledge your gift and also send you the information you need at the end of the tax year.

Food for the Poor in 36 years, we pride ourselves in the fact that we do not give or sell any partner information to anybody. It is a very, very secure process. You'll see too that it seals up. And it is a self-mailer so if you want to, need to you can take this home, pray about it, and mail it in. If you do that please don't forget about it because we need your help. But better yet, fill it out today, maybe during breakfast and I'll be there if you have any questions or anything I'm happy to answer them.

If you turn it in today, it will get that much faster to Food for the Poor, that much faster into helping those in desperate need. And if you hand it in to me today you'll save Food for the Poor the cost of the postage stamp which we could feed in these third world countries, a child a single meal for just 6 cents.

So, if you hand it to me today on top of whatever size donation you give, you'll also be feeding roughly 8 children. You can tell that with how much of your dollar actually goes to helping people. Whatever size donation you're able to give, will make a difference. A huge difference. And that's what we're talking about, making a difference in this world in Christ's name.

Would you consider, for just 50 dollars Food for the Poor can feed a hungry child and give them clean water for a whole year. 50 dollars. I don't know about you, but I have a hard time getting out of the grocery store just for a week or even fewer days of food at a grocery store. 50 dollars. And you can do the math, if you want to do a whole family like Carmen's, 50 times 2, 50 times 4. You can do that kind of math. Or maybe you would consider building a home for someone like Carmen's family that desperately needs housing and security. For 3,600 dollars, Food for the Poor will build a concrete block home with a tin roof, bathroom, kitchen, everything they could possibly need. It can be paid in a one-time amount or it can be broken down into monthly payments. It can be given in loving memory of somebody or in thanksgiving of something.

A powerful way, not to just to change that family's life but generations to come. Their lives are changed with being a part of a home. That's what Food for the Poor is about. About us working together in Jesus's name. And answering Jesus's call to us and be there in as many ways

that we can be for people locally as well as globally. Our neighbors, the people that Jesus has a big heart for.

I want to thank you for allowing me to be here today. And don't forget turn in your envelopes if you can. By the way, I earn brownie points for any envelopes that you turn in to me. So, help me out with my brownie points. I want to thank you for allowing me to come. I want to thank your rector, Father Greg for inviting me. The hospitality has been so wonderful. God bless you all and I'm happy to answer questions after the service. Thank you!

Guest Priest – The Reverend Holly Ostlund

Transcriber – Renee' Evans